

THE POLITICAL SITUATION

AND

LABOUR PROBLEMS.

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THE political question which is always with us is the "state of the nation." How do we live? Why is it that in spite of the wealth of our great cities some of us find it so hard to live at all? Why is it that the lives of so many of us are ceaseless struggles against a burden of poverty that tends to crush the manhood out of us? Why is it that, like Sisyphus, so many of us roll our load up hill only to find our task a continuous and hopeless one? Why is it that in this City of Glasgow, one may see human wretchedness, almost human starvation, such as one may not find anywhere else, in Manchester, in Liverpool, in London, in Paris? In the East End of London, in Limehouse, Poplar, and Shadwell, and on the Surrey side of the Thames there is a great area of depressed life; but to the shame of Glasgow, and in spite of the efforts of the Churches, in spite of voluntary, municipal, and State agencies of various kinds, in spite of City Improvement Schemes and charity organization, we have a depth of depressed life in patches

over a great part of the city to which it would be difficult to find a parallel in Europe.*

Our climate is no doubt to blame in part for the depression; but when all is said on that score it remains clear that two inter-dependent causes have produced what we see — these are character and institutions. It is impossible to discuss here and now either of these points fully; but it may be suggested that racial influences are very potent and very permanent in their effects upon character. Family and social customs, as well as personal habits, have a tenacious hold upon people, and what in scientific language is called "reversion to primitive types" frequently occurs in civilized communities. Change of habitat without corresponding change of habit is often exceedingly injurious. People come in to town from the country and fail to realize that the mode of life in the town is necessarily different from that to which they were accustomed. The fresh air of the open country affords a margin of life which the town does not. Town life is artificial, and the town dweller, if he would live according to nature, must go to it, or regulate his life in accordance with the new conditions in which he finds himself. Neglect of this obvious course of action brings disappointment, and finally degradation. The available surplus of life and energy is greater in the country than in the town, and thus it is necessary to take special means to secure this surplus of life and energy by all the

* "Of the inhabitants of Glasgow, 24·7 per cent. live in houses of one apartment; 44·7 per cent. in houses of two apartments; 16 per cent. in houses of three apartments; 6·1 per cent. in houses of four apartments; and only 8 per cent. in houses of five apartments and upwards."—*Dr. J. B. Russell, Medical Officer of Health for the City of Glasgow: "Life in One Room."* 1888.

means in our power. Open spaces, parks, baths, means of recreation of various kinds "pay" over and over again in the increased usefully exercised vitality of the citizens.

If any one were asked the most striking difference between the old time and the new, one would naturally answer, In the attitude of the people towards life. People are beginning to think less of returns in hard coin, and more of returns in vigorous bone and muscle, less of merely piling up wealth, and more of building up well-being.

It is hard to alter character by legislation, but legislation may alter character indirectly by altering institutions. This, then, is your *rôle* as electors ; you have it in your power to send persons to Parliament who will undertake to grapple with these questions, not as a mere political game, but as a serious work. There has been some sneering lately about the use of the expression "cause of humanity." I don't myself quite like the phrase. Standing by itself apart from the context in Sir James Carmichael's speech it is easy to make it look pompous.

"But it strikes me 'taint just the time
Fer stringin' words with settisfaction ;
Wat's wanted now is the silent rhyme
'Twixt upright will and downright action.

"Words if you keep 'em pay their keep,
But gabble's the short cut to ruin ;
It's gratis (gals half price) but cheap
At no rate—if it hinders doin'.

"Thank God, say I, for any plan
To lift one human bein's level,
Give one more chance to make a man
Or anyway to spile a devil."

It is useless to trifle about the phrase ; we must conspire to do the thing. It is not one plan that will suffice ; it

needs many. Our social body is so huge a monster, so built up of organs more or less delicate—some of them even more or less diseased—so rapidly growing both in size and in complexity that no Cockle's or Beecham's pill will cure it. Only by patient effort, by replacing laxity by efficiency—only by organization and adaptation of means to ends, by political sagacity in the highest sense, can we hope to make life better worth living for all of us. I am not speaking nor intending to speak to those who are depressed; I am speaking to people who are not themselves, perhaps, suffering directly from depression. But misery is contagious. Who is my neighbour? is a question that is always being answered for us. Depression of life is as pervasive as the atmosphere. You feel when you enter a city or a quarter of a city the deadly dulness of depressed human life. The very odours suggest it. The fœtid air of misery exudes from the houses. Oh, the gauntness, the desolation, the emptiness of life, the hopeless weary waiting for death—in these teeming rabbit-hutches that men call homes and live and breed and die in! Some time ago a great London mob swept along Piccadilly. They looted some shops and frightened the West End of London. The demonstration was no doubt unnecessarily aggressive; but the surge of the crowd must have taken westwards many people whose ordinary habitat was in squalid dens in Limehouse or Poplar, and to whom the sight of the shops and clubs and mansions in Piccadilly was as a glimpse of heaven—a rather material and perhaps even a vulgar kind of paradise, but still a paradise to them compared with the hell of their own homes. One side does not know how the other lives, and thus the cup of the one is too full and the cup of the other is too empty. Yet dulness and unintellectuality are as catching as

smallpox. By sanitary improvements we have made some diminution in the numbers of the victims of the one, we must try to make some diminution in the numbers of the victims of the other.

Some things cannot be done by legislation; many things may be done by it, you may, indeed you will, help to do them. Every effort is needed—individual effort, voluntary organizations, temperance societies, friendly societies, trade unions and co-operative societies (of which last indeed Tradedon is the headquarters in Scotland), municipal effort, state effort, both administrative and legislative. All these are needed, but it is specially with the last that we are concerned at the moment. The time is fully ripe every way for legislation on such questions. The people have it in their power to dictate how their affairs are to be ordered. By a curious law a temporary reaction always follows the passing of Reform Bills. This reaction is due no doubt to the sudden acquisition of political power by those who are unaccustomed to exercise it, and whose ignorance temporarily reinforces the ranks of Conservatism. This reaction must expend itself. It takes a time for the newly-fledged freeman to realize his freedom. The shackles have been removed; but he still feels their pressure and almost sees them upon his limbs. Any time within the past twenty years it needed no prophet to tell that the extension of the franchise had not been the end of all things. The admission to the electorate of practically the whole of the adult male population; the extension of education of a kind, free even to a certain point; the frequent pressure of industrial depression, increased leisure, growing alertness and intelligence, eager study of the conditions of life, with definite desire to mend them—these are some of the influences that have gone to change the attitude

of the people towards politics within less than a generation.

We cannot and ought not to slight the generation that gave us political power; but he who makes a tool may not be best able to work with it. The smith who makes a plough must give way to the ploughman. It is for you who have really in your hands the destinies of the nation to realise your responsibility to grapple with the great questions that are now emerging with almost bewildering rapidity, to look at them clearly and calmly, and to use the language of the ring, "You must know where to hit, when to hit, and how to hit." You must understand them before you vote upon them. It is a mistake to vote and see after. You want, above all things, clear insight into existing conditions, and into the meaning of proposed changes, and as much foresight as may be into their probable effects.

Among these questions, and foremost now among them, there is the cry for leisure, for time. Labour up till now, mainly dumb, has at last articulated a cry. In America, in Australasia, in India, on the Continent, in this country there is the same cry—for time, for leisure, for less continuous and excessive toil. The half delirious hopes of the dreamers have become crystallized into a demand. Now let us fairly face this question; let us ask ourselves what is to be said against it, and what is to be said for it.

There are three courses open—given a proposal for compulsory reduction of hours, ought this to be carried out by mutual agreement between employers and employed, by pressure from the trade unions, or by the State? We have not reached the stage when there is any likelihood of the first method being extensively adopted. In comparatively few industries are the workers so well organized that the employers feel that they must arrange the hours of work

with them on any but the customary basis. Even among employers ready and willing to shorten hours the question who is to begin is seldom answered. There is, then, the second method—the trade union method. Well, we have had bitter experience of that in Scotland. We have had the labour day prolonged to a preposterous length in the case of the railway servants. We have had repeated efforts on the part of the railway men to arrive at an agreement with their employers. The railway officials refused even to recognise the union. The strike took place, and after five weeks the men went back to work, under slightly improved conditions, it is true, but still under conditions only slightly less unfavourable than before. The loss to the railway companies and the men was considerable; to the public it was enormous. While the losses of the public cannot be put down in figures, the loss of the men on strike amounted to one month's income, the loss of the Caledonian Railway shareholders amounted to two months' income, and the loss to the North British Railway shareholders amounted to six months' income. A strike is an expensive way of settling disputes about hours of labour. I am bound to say that while before the railway strike I was of opinion that trade unions might probably actually secure shorter hours before the public were brought to the pitch of demanding legislative interference, the strike convinced me that in securing shorter hours the way to cause least disturbance to industry, and the way to save unnecessary friction between employers and employed was by legislation.

The State, then, is the remaining alternative. It is not too much to say that *laissez faire* is dead. It has really been reduced to its logical conclusion in the *clean sweep* of Mr. Auberon Herbert. If everything is to be let alone, then

we must have the abolition of all government services, and the sale of all government property ; free trade in all things, free trade in the liquor traffic. That is *laissez faire*. That is let things alone. That is the logical consequence of opposition to all interference by the State with the proceedings of the individual. There are many attractive things in Mr. Herbert's programme which for the past few years he has been promulgating like a voice crying in the wilderness. But the Party of Individual Liberty somehow does not grow, although Lord Wemyss every now and again gives an amusing speech in the House of Lords against what he calls socialistic legislation. While each claim for State interference must justify itself upon its own grounds, the general theoretic objection to wet-nursing and legislative interference generally is as dead as the Ptolemaic system.

In the first place, the case is a clamant and necessary one ; in the second, the people can get it if they say so at the polls.

The great point is that this is a movement for more leisure, for fuller and ampler life, for more real enjoyment of existence. In certain industries I have no doubt that the first effect of the reduction of the hours of labour would be the reduction of wages, save in those trades where competition from abroad was not keen, and where the unions were strong enough to resist reduction. Even where wages were reduced the loss would necessarily be temporary. Each reduction of hours of labour has been followed, at a distance it is true, but still followed, by increase of wages. In those industries in which shorter hours may be secured by mutual agreement between employers and employed, where they may be secured by trade union effort, by all means let these methods be tried ; but there remains a great number

of industries which are not organized, which have no immediate prospect of being organized, especially trades carried on by women, where the conditions of labour are such as to produce with infallible certainty disastrous results both in this and in succeeding generations.

By whatever means shorter hours are to be had, they must be had. In those industries where the hours of labour brought the working day from an immoderate to a moderate length, the gain would far exceed the loss. Several large employers of labour to whom I have spoken upon this subject are of opinion that in the eight hours' working day more work and better work will be done than in a ten or twelve hours' day. An extremely interesting and valuable paper was read recently before the Sheffield Trades' Council by Mr. R. A. Hadfield of Hadfield's Steel Foundry Company. Mr. Hadfield is well known as an original scientific investigator as well as an enlightened employer. The firms who reported to Mr. Hadfield the results of the working out in their experience of the eight hours' day were Messrs. Brunner, Mond, & Co., salt manufacturers, Northwich; Messrs. S. H. Johnson & Co., engineers, Stratford, London, E.; Messrs. Short Brothers, shipbuilders, Sunderland; and Mr. William Allan, engineer, Sunderland. The experience of the firms, as is also that of Messrs. Hadfield, is entirely in favour of the short day.

Among the replies to queries put by Mr. Hadfield to the firms mentioned are the following:—

1. So far as ascertainable the cost of production is less than formerly.
2. More work done.
3. Foreign competition is a "bogey."

4. All adopting the eight hours' system will be in pocket by the change.

5. Much appreciated by the men.

6. Men more intelligent.

7. Men become dawdlers if compelled to work longer than their physical strength will allow.

8. Four per cent. of absentees at starting instead of twenty per cent.

"The workers' demands," says Mr. Hadfield, "whatever they may be in some cases, are in this case just and needful. The country would in every way benefit from the change, and would have nobly set an example which would probably soon be copied by other nations."

Perhaps, also, you will take in addition to the evidence of these practical men the authority of Professor Marshall, who in a book published the other day fully endorses the short hours movement. He says, for example, "Since material wealth exists for the sake of man, and not man for the sake of material wealth, the fact that inefficient and stunted human beings had been replaced by more efficient and fuller lives would be a gain of a higher order than any temporary material loss that might have been occasioned on the way. This argument assumes that the new rest and leisure raises the standard of life. And such a result is almost certain to follow in extreme cases of overwork. For in them a mere lessening of tension is a necessary condition for taking the first step upwards."*

The old cries have largely lost their charm—new ones have taken their places. Opinion has been marching rapidly; ideas that were revolutionary thirty, twenty, ten

* "Elements of Economics of Industry," p. 365.

years ago are accepted commonplaces; we have, perhaps, swallowed some projects in parcels without enquiry, because, like margarine, they have been christened and marked on the paper by authority.

This is, after all, only history repeating itself. Many of you know the history of Chartism. You know how three or four years after the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832 Chartism raised its head out of the unknown sea of the new electorate. It partly justified the warnings of the "stern, unbending Tories" who opposed the Bill, because the people had demands to make, and they made them. Let us look back upon these demands. The six points of the Charter were—

1. Universal suffrage for every man who is of age, sane, and unconvicted of crime.
2. Annual Parliaments.
3. Payment of Members of Parliament.
4. Voting by Ballot.
5. Equal Electoral Districts.
6. Abolition of the qualification of property in land in the case of Parliamentary candidates.

Well, three of these have been fully granted. We have vote by ballot, equal electoral districts, and no landed property qualification for candidates for Parliament. A fourth may almost be said to be granted, in spite of certain defects which are likely to be remedied, connected with registration of electors and so forth, we may say that we have practically secured universal male suffrage. Even the Chartists somehow ungallantly kept the women out of the Charter. In spite of the fiery enthusiasm of Jeremy Bentham for annual Parliaments, as opposed even to a triennial election, this point of the Charter has never caught on to

the public mind. We may, though, have quinquennial or triennial Parliaments ere long. As regards payment of members the debate in the House of Commons the other evening showed that this is not far off. Thus these six points of the Charter of 1835 have all become common-places, most of them have been already passed, and the remainder are in the way of being passed. Yet in 1835, when these points were first promulgated, and even later, long after the Chartist movement had collapsed, they were regarded as utterly revolutionary, and the men who advocated the Charter were imprisoned and even shot down by troops. History is now repeating itself. The reaction after the Reform Bill of 1884 has long been expended. The new electorate, startled out of its equanimity by being called upon to vote in a new way, or for the first time in 1885, had not recovered in 1886, when it sent the present Conservative Government into office. It has recovered now, and if there is any reliance to be placed in historical precedents, the next election will see the Conservative administration swept from office by an overwhelming Liberal majority at the polls.

There is at the moment a principle at stake, and it is this—Does the franchise mean anything or does it not? That principle is at stake in two directions. First, as regards Ireland; second, as regards labour. Almost since the ill-fated Union the Irish have been demanding emancipation from what they regarded as the alien rule of England. They have been demanding self-government. Mr. Joseph Cowen, who, besides being a great phrasemonger, has many of the qualities of a great man, has said in one of his series of epigrams delivered as speeches, that “the most erring form of self-government is better than the most benign

despotism that ever existed, or can be conceived. Time has no influence upon principles. It cannot change their nature or their quality." And again he says, "Great national movements must centre either round a great man or round a great principle." The Irish have no man, but they have a principle; and for a hundred years they have been unfalteringly true to it. The plain fact for us is that we have tried government by concession and have failed, government by coercion and have failed miserably, government by conciliation and have failed likewise. What is there left but to see how the Irish can govern themselves? They have been so much governed that their experience of governing themselves will be novel, and no doubt they will make many mistakes. Besides, one of the conditions of the case is that the constitution of Ireland must be a paper constitution, and a paper constitution, strange as it may seem, is either a cast-iron or an india-rubber one. If it is a cast-iron one, it tends to sterilise the progress of a people; if it is an india-rubber one, it is apt to promote wobbling. The constitution of England is a model one, because it has no existence on paper. It is neither cast-iron nor india-rubber, although, so long as the House of Lords contributes to its rigidity, it may be regarded as more the first than the second. Well, Ireland has all along demanded a constitution. We knew that when we passed the Reform Bill in 1832. We knew it when we passed every successive Reform Bill down to the last in 1884. We knew that immediately after each extension of the franchise there came always with increasing emphasis the message from the Irish polls. Home Rule! always Home Rule! We gave Ireland the franchise; in effect we said to the people, vote for what you want, and when they told us what they wanted

we met their representatives with a calm No! and their protests with imprisonment and bullets. And our members of Parliament went about the country saying something like this, which is from Biglow (altered):—

I du believe wutever trash
 'Il keep the people in blindness,—
 Thet we the Irishmen can thrash
 Right inter brotherly kindness,
 Thet battering-rams an' powder 'n ball
 Air goodwill's strongest magnets,
 Thet peace, to make it stick at all,
 Must be druv in with bagnets.

But the battering ram and the bagnet business did not succeed. The people could neither be cozened into forgetting, nor coerced into foregoing their claim. Years of precious time have been expended over the Irish Question. Legislation of all kinds has been retarded by it; the refusal of Home Rule is now seen to have been a piece of mischievous injustice from the beginning. At whatever cost to English pride, for it is this rather than Scotch pride that stands in the way, the Irish must have Home Rule, because they have asked for it in the constitutional manner provided for them by us, and for no other necessary reason. There are many other reasons, but one good one will suffice.

I hope you would support the cause of Ireland, even though it were dissociated from your own interests; but it is not so. If the claim for self-government as made at the polls by the Irish people continues to be rejected by England, the likelihood is that any claim that you may make in the same manner may be rejected also. Do not allow yourselves to be used to break your neighbours' heads, were it only for the reason that the same arm may send your neighbours' heads against yours. When you have clearly formulated

industrial and social legislation, and have clearly asked for it at the polls, you will expect to get it. If Ireland wins, you may ; if Ireland loses, you may not. I suggest nothing that is not perfectly evident to every thinking man, that unless the wisest and most far-seeing counsels are taken, the history of Ireland will repeat itself in the history of labour. The labour party seems desirous of succeeding the Irish party in the House of Commons. In the meantime, at all events, this seems to me to be a mistaken ambition. As our representative system is at present organized, there is only room for two parties. Under such a system as Mr. Hare's Proportional Representation Scheme, or under a system of double ballot, it would be practicable to have any number of political parties. There might thus be a temperance party, a publicans' party, a labour party, and a capitalists' party. But at present we are working under a different system.

The Tory party is always homogeneous, it is always in an attitude of resistance. It is continually pressed back ; but it invariably presents an unbroken front ; when a shot harrows its ranks it closes them up. It makes up in compactness for its want of numbers. The party of progress, on the other hand, is varied enough. Everybody is pressing on, but there is a good deal of delay through the collisions that constantly occur. The generals may issue orders of the day, aide-de-camps may hurry, and the officers may shout themselves hoarse, but there is always some point where there is a deadlock, inefficient officers and disorganised regiments get muddled up, come into conflict, and in this fratricidal warfare are sometimes more bellicose against each other than they are against the enemy. Then some one appears, restores order, re-

organises the demoralised troops, and carries everybody with good heart against the common enemy. This is what must be done in Tradeston. I have no desire to blame anybody, but it is an open secret that the Liberal party in the division has fallen into some such position as I have described. This thing will not do. The Liberal cause must be rescued from petty strife, and the seat must be carried for progress against reaction, for Ireland against another generation of coercion, with its concomitants, outrage and disorder.

Do not suppose for a moment that I have any desire or intention to discredit either party. I feel that at this stage that an honourable compromise might be arrived at between the two parties. I am heart and soul with the Liberals. I am heart and soul with the working men. I believe firmly that, for the reason I have mentioned, the people will get what they need from the Legislature more quickly and surely, and certainly more sympathetically and less grudgingly, through the Liberal party than through the Tories; therefore, while there is opportunity for consideration before embarking upon a policy which would have far-reaching consequences, I wish to put plainly before you the inexpediency of attempting, at any rate at this election, to form an independent labour party.

The sake of Ireland demands this sacrifice, and it is worth the sacrifice, which is no sacrifice, but a plain question of order. Where two cannot go abreast, one must go behind. While I think that this sacrifice may fairly be asked of the labour party, a sacrifice must be asked on the other side. The questions which must come after the Irish question are largely social and labour questions. By social questions, I mean temperance and cognate questions; by labour questions, I mean the hours of labour, the mode of dealing with labour

disputes and cognate questions. Now, one of two things must happen—either a Conservative Government will go into power at the next election or a Liberal Government will. If the *first*, we shall have more strong government for Ireland, more concessions and more trouble. No one can predict what may be the next phase of the most knotty constitutional problem of modern times, where a majority of a nominally free people coerce a minority and insist upon governing them whether they will or not. If the *second*, there will be a strenuous effort to deal decisively with the Irish question. If this effort eventuates in the rejection of the measure, the result will be much the same as if a Conservative Government had been returned—nothing will be done, and we shall have coercion again. If, on the other hand, the measure passes, then the social and labour questions come next indubitably. Therefore, if, as I believe, the bulk of the constituency desire that the last mentioned course of events should be the actual course, viz., that the Home Rule Bill should pass, and then that the way should be made clear for much-needed domestic legislation, it is quite clear that the man whom you adopt should not be chosen on account of his adhesion to one part of the programme alone, whichever part that be. It is not Ireland alone, or labour alone that you have to consider at this election, but both together. I wish to make it clear also that my sole purpose in coming forward is to endeavour to unite the sections of the Liberal party in the division.

It may be that in the future great principles and great names will be less associated together than they have been; but since 1836, at all events, and for ever after, the cause of Ireland must be associated with the name of Mr. Gladstone. Mr. Gladstone has always gone upon the principle—Trust the

people. Give them the franchise, and risk their asking something which it would be injurious to them to have. They have not been trusted for nothing, they have always been steadied by every increase of political power. Responsibility, and power have gone together. Both as regards Ireland and as regards labour the people may be trusted.